

**BOSTON'S HIGH SCHOOLS**

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prepared by the Citywide Educational Coalition  
in cooperation with the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce**Q. HOW MANY PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS ARE THERE IN BOSTON?****A.** The Boston Public Schools has 17 high schools.

- \* 3 are exam schools — Boston Latin Academy, Boston Latin School and Boston Technical — with admission based on test scores and grades.
  - \* 5 are magnet schools, open to all students: Boston High, Copley, English, Madison Park, Umana.
  - \* 9 are district schools, with most students assigned from a geographic district.
- Adding alternative and special needs programs, the BPS has a total of 21 high school buildings.

**Q. WHO ATTENDS BPS HIGH SCHOOLS?****A.** A total of 15,403 students go to BPS high schools:

|                    |       |          |              |                               |       |
|--------------------|-------|----------|--------------|-------------------------------|-------|
| grade 9 . . . . .  | 4,752 | who are: | 50% black    | and who attend:               |       |
| grade 10 . . . . . | 4,098 |          | 25% white    | exam schools . . . . .        | 3,239 |
| grade 11 . . . . . | 3,462 |          | 16% Hispanic | magnet schools . . . . .      | 4,638 |
| grade 12 . . . . . | 3,091 |          | 9% Asian     | district schools . . . . .    | 7,321 |
|                    |       |          | 1% other     | specialized schools . . . . . | 205   |

**Q. WHAT COURSES DO BOSTON'S HIGH SCHOOLS OFFER?**

**A.** All schools offer a core curriculum of standard, required high school courses: four years of English, two of math, etc. Several years ago, the BPS added remedial English and math classes — Basic and General, comparable to 7th and 8th grade course work — for high school students. More than half the students in non-exam high schools start with Basic and General courses. It is possible — and common — for a student to graduate having taken Basic, General, Grade 9 and Grade 10 English.

**Q. WHAT HAPPENS TO A "TYPICAL" NINTH GRADE STUDENT?**

**A.** The BPS followed the 5,852 students who began Grade 9 in September, 1982, and tracked what happened to each. The results — a cohort study — show that:

|             |                                                                                 |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2,700 (46%) | dropped out of school, more than the number that graduated                      |
| 1,917 (33%) | graduated in June, 1986                                                         |
| 661 (11%)   | transferred to other school systems                                             |
| 346 (6%)    | were still enrolled in September, 1986, having been kept back at least one year |
| 117 (2%)    | graduated after summer school in August, 1986                                   |
| 111 (2%)    | were "other loss".                                                              |

**Q. WHO DROPS OUT?**

|                         |                 |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>A.</b> In 1986-1987, | In 1986-1987    |
| dropouts were:          | enrollment was: |
| 48% black               | 49% black       |
| 27% white               | 27% white       |
| 20% Hispanic            | 16% Hispanic    |
| 5% Asian                | 9% Asian        |

**Q. WHAT HAPPENS TO DROPOUTS?**

**A.** No one knows. No single agency, public or private, follows their progress or acts as a central clearinghouse for those who want to return to school.

**Q. WHAT HAPPENS TO BPS GRADUATES?**

**A.** In a study of the class of 1987, the Private Industry Council found:

- \* 36% are in a four-year college
- \* 34% work and don't go to school
- \* 16% are in a two-year college
- \* 5% are neither working nor in school
- \* 4% are in a training program
- \* 3% are in the military
- \* 2% are "other" (pregnant, ill or not seeking work).

**Q. WHO ARE SOME FAMOUS BPS GRADUATES?**

**A.** Samuel Adams, Gennaro Anguilo, Henry Ward Beecher, Francis Bellotti, Leonard Bernstein, Charles Bulfinch, Ralph W. Emerson, Louis Farrakhan, Edward Everett Hale, John Hancock, Mother Mary Joseph (founder of Maryknoll Nuns), Joseph & Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, Cotton Mather, Mary McGrory, Melvin Miller (*Bay State Banner* Publisher), J.P. Morgan, Leonard Nimoy (*Star Trek's* "Mr. Spock"), Josiah Quincy Jr., George Santayana, Sarah Anne Shaw, Donna Summer, Clifford Wharton, Theodore White.

**Q. HOW DO BPS HIGH SCHOOLS "MEASURE UP"?**

- A.** There are many ways to gauge a school's "success," the most common being statistical: test scores, dropout rates, etc. Others are less measurable — school climate, staff cooperation, etc. — but may be, research says, equally or more important. [Keep in mind: most bilingual or special needs students are exempt from most standardized tests.]

**Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT)** . . . . . National Median: 50th percentile  
In 1987, four schools scored above the national median in grade 9 reading . . . Median scores for the remaining schools were between the 29th & 49th percentiles. . .  
over the 50th%: Between 36th-50th%: 35th% or below:  
Latin School, Latin Academy Copley, East Boston, Tech, Hyde Park, Boston High,  
Umana, Charlestown English, Burke, Madison Park/HHORC,  
West Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, Dorchester  
South Boston, Brighton

**Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the "College Boards",** test the verbal & math skills of college-bound juniors or seniors. A *minimum* combined score is 400; a *maximum* is 1600. In 1986, the median combined scores by school ranged from 1,105 to 581. . .  
over 1,000: between 1,000-700: between 700-581:  
Latin School Latin Academy, Boston High, Charlestown, Umana, Jamaica Plain, East  
Tech, Another Course to Boston, Brighton, West Roxbury, South  
College (Alternative program) Boston, Copley, Hyde Park, Dorchester,  
Madison Park/HHORC, English, Burke

**State Basic Skills Tests (grades 3, 6, & 9)** in reading, writing and math are designed to identify individual students who are "at-risk" of failure. For 1987, the percentage of grade 9 students who passed all three tests was:  
More than 90%: between 75% & 50%: between 50% & 25%:  
Latin School, East Boston, Umana, Tech, South East Boston, Jamaica Plain, Burke, Boston  
Latin Academy Copley, Hyde Park, High, Charlestown, Dorchester, Madison  
Brighton, English Park/HHORC, West Roxbury

**Annual Dropout Rates,** the percent of students who drop out in a school year, vary greatly  
under 5%: 5%-10%: 10%-20%: 20% or more:  
Latin School, Copley, Hyde Park Umana, West Roxbury, Boston High, South Boston,  
Latin Academy, Tech Burke, English, East Dorchester, Jamaica Plain  
Boston, Charlestown,  
Madison Park/HHORC,  
Brighton

**Q. WHAT IS THE BPS DOING TO REDUCE THE DROPOUT RATE & IMPROVE ACHIEVEMENT?**

- A.** The BPS has developed a number of programs. Best known may be the Boston Compact, an agreement with the city's businesses, colleges and trade unions guaranteeing jobs, college placement and/or financial help to BPS graduates. Other programs — run by the Boston Community Schools, ABCD, & the Mayor's Office — offer dropouts another chance to get a high school diploma.

**Q. HAVE THESE EFFORTS HAD AN EFFECT?**

- A.** This attention has begun to pay off with some improvements in some areas:  
*Attendance:* up. In 1983, attendance at the non-exam schools averaged from 71%-84%. For 1987, the average was 78%-87%.  
*Annual Dropout Rate:* down. In 1983-84, 16.9% of all BPS students in grades 9-12 dropped out of school. In 1986-87, 13.9% did.  
*Job Placement:* increasing. More than 3,000 students got summer jobs last year, and 1,007 graduates got full-time permanent jobs with more than 600 companies.

**CWEC COMMENTARY. . .**

By any measure, Boston's high schools are in crisis. The structure, curriculum and approach of the traditional comprehensive high school is not working.

While the problems are obvious — the remedial needs of the students, the crumbling facilities, the lack of professional development for teachers, and the patchwork of programs — solutions have proven harder to come by. CWEC urges the Superintendent, School Committee, headmasters, teachers, parents, and the Boston Teachers' Union to *immediately* begin debate on a whole new approach, on a total restructuring of the city's high schools.

The timing is right. The student assignment plan is being rewritten this year, and high school issues — structure, size, curricula, programs, organization — *must* be given serious attention. The city's declining resources have triggered recent debates about how to fund the schools adequately *and* build-in accountability. Most importantly, the BTU contract expires next year, and any talk of reform *has* to start at the bargaining table.

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| over 1,000:  | between 1,000-700:            | between 700-581:                        |
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|              | Tech, Another Course to       | Boston, Brighton, West Roxbury, South   |
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| Latin Academy, Tech |                   | Burke, English, East | Dorchester, Jamaica Plain  |
|                     |                   | Boston, Charlestown, |                            |
|                     |                   | Madison Park/HHORC,  |                            |
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